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THE MAKING OF A MAN

WILLIAM JENNINGS BRYAN

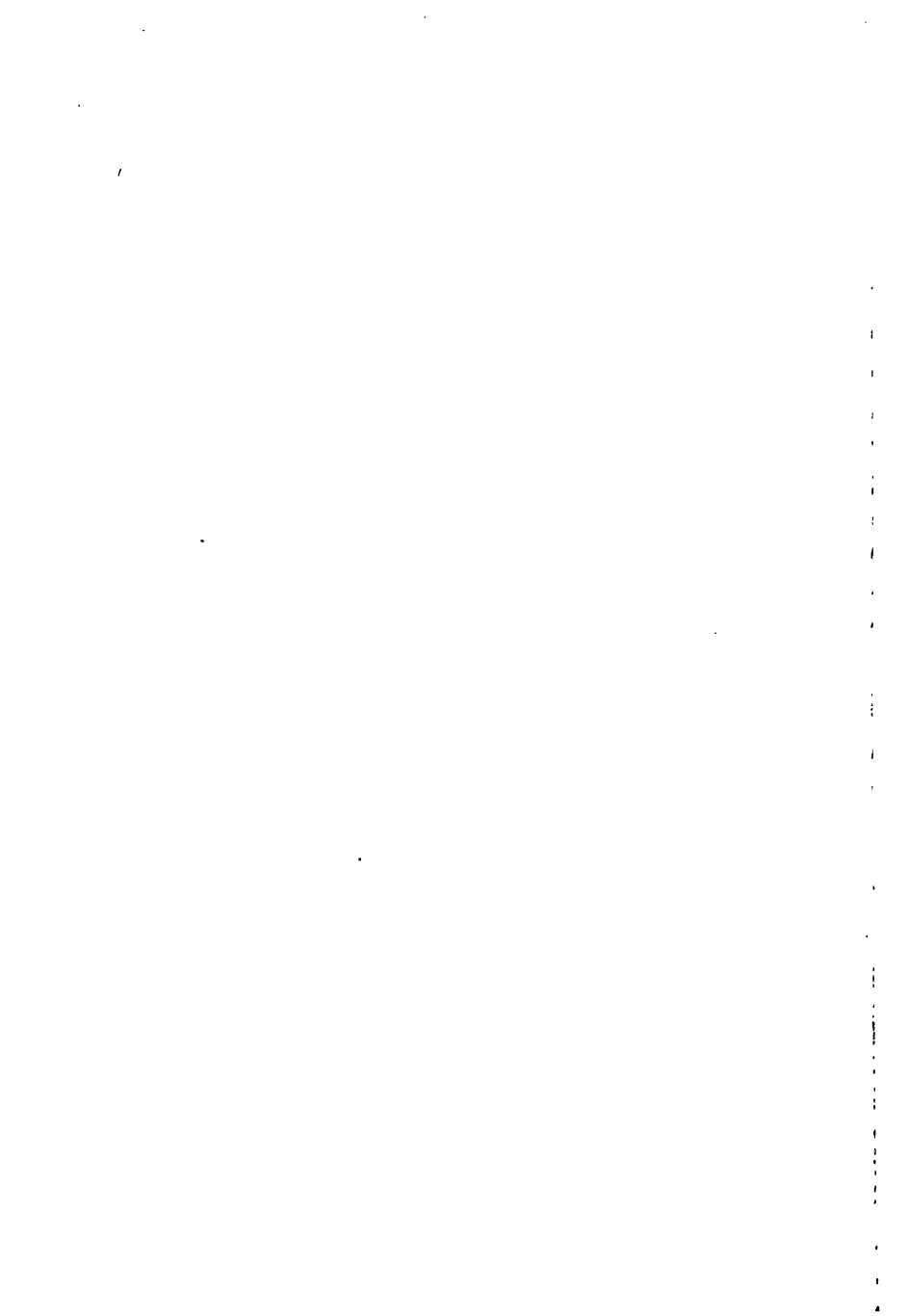




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By
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The Making of a Man

By
WILLIAM JENNINGS BRYAN



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The Making of a Man

WE spend relatively too much time in the perfecting of the things which man uses and too little time in the perfecting of man himself. In this age of coöperation we find an increasing multitude of organizations, each one dedicated to a special purpose—that purpose being the improvement of something that will serve man. To illustrate what I mean, let us consider agriculture for a moment; it is the largest single department of industrial activity among our people. Who will enumerate the farmers' organizations? Some make a specialty of cattle raising, and these are

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subdivided into groups that direct their attention, some to milk breeds, some to beef breeds ; and each of these subdivisions is still further subdivided into groups that give preference to some particular strain.

In like manner we have numerous organizations whose members devote attention to swine breeding, each group perfecting a type. Next come the horse breeders, and these are subdivided into fanciers of the draft horse (still further subdivided into several smaller groups), the coach horse, the trotting horse, the riding horse, and the racing horse—not to speak of the different kinds of ponies for children. All of these are trying to produce the best animal of their kind but they are producing and perfecting for man. Then they have the poultry group,

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with the rivalries between many varieties ; and so, also, with the organizations that have for their object the production of grains, vegetables, fruits, berries, etc.

If we leave the farm and come into the city, we find the work of specialization as fully developed among the manufacturers, each one endeavouring to produce the best article in his line at the lowest cost. The commercial life of our municipalities, the social life of our communities, the political life of state and nation, our schools, our hospitals, our churches, —all afford illustration of the ceaseless effort to develop, to improve, to perfect everything that man can employ to please the body, to minister to the mind or to satisfy the soul.

If man is worthy to have so much thought and labour devoted to his com-

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fort and advancement, surely there is no theme more deserving of our consideration than The Making of a Man.

Only when we come to man do we find an immeasurable gulf between extremes. We can describe the difference between the largest potato and the smallest one in ounces, the difference between the best steer and the poorest one in pounds, and the difference between the most valuable horse and the least valuable one in dollars ; but who will suggest a ratio between man as he may be and man as he sometimes is? Man at his best is but little lower than the angels, while man at his worst may in some respects be worse than the brutes about him. And each one of us is moving each day, each hour, in one direction or the other,—we are either ascending towards the highest point that man can

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reach or descending towards the lowest depths to which man can fall !

If I am to present plans and specifications I owe it to you in return for your attention to present those suitable for the building of a life upon the highest possible plane, a life capable of realizing the best that is attainable by man.

We recognize at once that in dealing with man we are dealing with a threefold being. It is not difficult for me to believe in the Trinity, for I see a sort of trinity in every human being. There is in each one of us a physical man, a mental man, and a moral man—so inseparable that one cannot exist upon this earth without the other, and yet so distinct that one may be developed and the others left undeveloped. The body may be lifted to a

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high state of physical perfection, while the mind and the heart are uncultured ; the mind, too, may be developed, while the body and the heart are overlooked ; and even the heart may receive consideration, while the training of the body and the mind is neglected.

We first become aware of the presence of the body and for a while it is our chief concern. Later we become conscious of the possession of a mind, and the mind, in time, takes control of the body—woe to the body that is not subject to the decrees of the mind. If the development is normal, we finally note the arrival upon the scene of the moral man, and the moral man claims the throne—woe to the individual in whom the physical man and the mental man are not obedient to the moral man.

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When we come to consider the development of the body, we must again recognize a natural subdivision and consider three factors that enter largely into man's physical welfare, namely, that which we inherit, that which we add, and that which we conserve. In physical appearance, in stature, in our constitutional strength to resist disease and endure fatigue, we are largely according to inheritance. The Bible asks, "Can one add a cubit to his stature?" The question implies a negative reply.

I can testify that one's stature is not of his choosing. When a boy I had my ideal of the physical proportions proper for a man. I wanted to be six feet in height and weigh one hundred and eighty pounds. During the earlier years of my college life I felt confident

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that I would reach the height desired. I grew very rapidly when about fifteen—so rapidly between September and Christmas that I wrote to my father complaining that my trousers were getting short and asking for money with which to purchase a new pair. He answered that I would come home soon for the holidays and that I could then supply my needs. But my reason for remembering his letter and my rapid growth at that period is found in the words with which he concluded his letter. He said, "But you might as well learn now that people will measure you by the length of your head and not by the length of your breeches."

As I approached maturity I became fearful that I would not reach the six-foot mark. I longed to be a little taller—tried to lift myself up—but with all that

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I could do I stopped short an inch and a half, and I am not sure that I was pleased when I overran in weight as much as I underran in height.

I repeat that inheritance has stamped certain limitations upon the physical man and yet it is possible to a degree to add to that inheritance. It is not only right but eminently desirable that one should take an inventory of himself at as early a date as possible, and, finding out the weak places, proceed with intelligence and diligence to strengthen them. We should raise ourselves to the highest point of physical efficiency not only that we may render the maximum of service but that we may, as a link in the endless chain of existence, transmit to posterity even a larger store of physical wealth than we inherited.

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But I need not dwell upon the first and second factors. The third—the conservation of that which we inherit and of that which we add to it—this deserves special emphasis. It is an awe-inspiring thought that the Creator has put it in our power to dissipate our strength, to destroy the body. If a young man inherits a fortune and squanders it, we say, “Foolish young man ;” but only a few in a generation are in a position to throw away a fortune. But every young man when he becomes master of himself is put into possession of a body which is worth more to him than any fortune, and he can waste this body, squander it, throw it away as effectually as one can dispose of a fortune in money—and some do so.

How can I impress upon the young men who honour me by their attention

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the turpitude of such conduct? How can I better make them conscious of the obligation which possession of such wealth imposes upon them than by showing them how much it costs to raise a boy? Two years ago I heard a statement that is in point here—the strongest statement I have ever heard outside of the Bible. It was this: that the suffering which woman endures as a penalty for motherhood is greater than all the suffering caused by all the wars of all the world—that the agonies which she voluntarily takes upon herself to be the mother of a race surpasses all the agonies of all the battle-fields. Is that not a startling statement? And yet, upon reflection, I believe that it is true.

We have in the United States more than ninety million of human beings;

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that means that on more than ninety million of occasions a mother's life trembled in the balance at a child's birth. And this is just the beginning. Compute the value of the time—from a third to a half of the average woman's life is devoted to the rearing of children. Calculate the worth of the nerve force and energy employed in child raising and then estimate, if you can, the wealth of love that woman pours out upon her children ; add all this together and then tell me how much a boy is worth when he is ready to throw himself away !

Is it not strange that any young man would do so ? And yet many do. And what is even stranger still, there are those who eagerly assist in the work of ruin—there are those who lie in wait for the young man, set snares for him and make

money by dragging him down and shattering the hopes that have been built upon his life! Christians,—for I may assume that I am appealing to Christian readers,—we have not done all that we might have done to strengthen these young men and save them.

I remember when a boy to have heard my mother tell a story of a very charitable woman who always defended a person criticized in her presence. Her children decided one day to put the mother to test and so, assembling by agreement in her room, they began one after another to find fault with the devil. They had not gone far, however, before the mother stopped them with the remark, "Well, children, if we were all as industrious as the devil is, we would accomplish more." Yes, if we were as industrious in our

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efforts to save young men as the devil is in his efforts to lead them astray, not so many would go wrong.

A few years ago a conservation congress met at the White House. The Governors of the States, the Senators, the Members of Congress, and a few not in official life were invited. Experts gave statistics to show how the coal was being consumed, how the beds of iron ore were being exhausted, how the timber lands were being cut over, and how the soil was being wasted. It was an impressive showing, and a deep interest has been taken in conservation ever since. It is an important matter and we owe it to future generations to deal wisely with the natural resources of the country; but what we need most is the conservation of the manhood and womanhood of

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the land—these are our priceless resources.

But having emphasized the value of the body, I now remind you that the body alone is worthless. No boy would be worth raising if there was nothing more to him than his body. When we give so much time and care to the boy's body it is because we have in mind his mind and at heart his heart.

The development of the mental man next claims our attention, although in this age of intellectual enthusiasm I need hardly discuss the importance of education. And yet with all of our boasted advantages only a small percentage of our boys and girls complete a college course, a very large percentage do not graduate from the high school, and a very considerable proportion do not finish

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the grades of the common schools. As I have visited different sections of the country I have been impressed by the fact that a majority of the high school students are girls—sometimes the girls outnumber the boys three or four to one.

That means that the boys are dropping out, before they even take advantage of the high school course which is brought so close to their homes. Several explanations have been given of this inclination on the part of the boys to quit school at an early age. The first is that parents do not fully appreciate the advantages of the schools and therefore do not bring to bear upon the child the parental influence which should be exerted in the direction of thorough education. Bring me a father who does not understand the value of education and I will attempt to im-

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press it upon his mind by a comparison.

There is not a state in the union in which a father is permitted to cut off his boy's arm—not a state in which he would not be punished criminally if he attempted to send his boy out thus mutilated to compete with the boys having two arms. This is the law, and public opinion supports it. And yet in this age the father who would deliberately deny to his boy the advantages of an education and send him out half educated to compete with boys well educated would really be more cruel to his son than the father who cut off an arm.

It is sometimes argued that the boy must be taken from school to assist in the support of the family. If such an excuse is given to me I ask whether it is the

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boy's father or mother who needs his support. If I am told that the boy is withdrawn from the school that the father may add his wages to his own, I ask what kind of a father he is, whether he is intelligent, industrious and sober. If I learn that an intelligent, industrious and sober father is not able to make a living for his family, I ask what kind of an industrial system we have that so unfairly distributes the rewards of toil. If, on the contrary, I find that it is not the fault of the system but the fault of the father ; if I find that instead of spending his income upon his family he spends it upon himself and in such a way as to lessen his value as a husband and father, I ask what equity there is in our courts if they will compel the return of a few dollars borrowed from a neighbour and

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will not require a man to live up to the sacred obligations of husband and father.

But suppose it is a widowed mother who is dependent upon a boy's wages, what then? Should she suffer? No. Neither should the burden fall upon the child. The time will come, if it has not already arrived, when the able-bodied men of a community will be willing to bear any burden that may be necessary to supplement the income of one so situated—the time will come, if it has not already arrived, when they will be ashamed to throw such a burden upon a helpless child to the impairment of its own future and of its ability to meet the responsibilities of life.

There is one other excuse, namely, that the boy will not go to school. Before giving him up, let us make one more effort. I would take him to a wood-pile, a

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large wood-pile, and put him to work with a dull ax. When he has laboured long enough to know how hard it is to accomplish anything with such an ax, I would give him a sharp ax, and then when he was thoroughly acquainted with the difference between the two, I would tell him that the difference between meeting life's problem with a trained mind and an untrained mind is even greater than the difference between cutting with a sharp ax and a dull one.

But I apologize for dwelling so long upon the mind. As I said in the beginning, this is not apt to be neglected. It only remains for me to remind you before passing to the third branch of my subject, that a body, however perfect, and a mind, however thoroughly trained, will not suffice. A man may be even

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more dangerous to society because of his education if the energies of body and mind are not properly directed. An ignorant scoundrel can do less harm than an educated one and he can be caught more quickly. When we provide, therefore, for universal education, it is with the expectation that the heart as well as the head will be developed.

And now we come to the most important part of the subject—the development of moral character. We measure men by moral standards ; we know them by their heart characteristics. If moral character is the matter of supreme importance, upon what foundation shall we build it ? I know of no foundation for a moral code except a religious foundation. I am aware that in saying this I enter a field of controversy, but it has

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been so long since I said anything that no one objected to that a little opposition does not embarrass me. I know of no moral standard deserving of the name which was not built upon religion.

And even if it were possible to find a moral standard whose foundations go down so deep or extend back so far that a religious basis for it could not be found, no such system will be possible in the future. Unless some great catastrophe shall destroy all that man now knows, there will never be found in the ages yet to come a group of men anywhere capable of formulating a moral code whose ideas on the subject of morals will not have been coloured by the Sermon on the Mount, so all-pervading is the thought of the Nazarene.

There are some who believe that ma-

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terialism furnishes a basis for morals; I cannot agree with them. There are others who believe reason to be a sufficient guide, but I call you to witness that in most of us the foundations of character are largely laid before our reasons are mature. The law fixes the age of twenty-one as the period when the young man's reason can be trusted, but who would dare to wait until his boy was twenty-one before impressing upon him the moral principles that guide one's life? Look back at your own lives and see how little you have added in the matter of moral principles since you were grown. I confess that I cannot find much in my own life for which I can claim credit—I acknowledge my indebtedness to Christian parents, a Christian home, a Christian church, and a Christian environment.

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That you may refresh your own memories I venture to refer to things that entered into my life at an early age. My mother so impressed upon my youthful mind and heart the objections to swearing that when I entered school at the age of ten I found myself unconsciously withdrawing from the crowd when boys began to swear, and I have never overcome my aversion to an oath. Whenever I hear a man swear now, the inclination returns to get out of the range of his voice. I venture the assertion that those who do not swear can in nine cases out of ten trace the fact to the teachings of mother or father.

My father hated gambling—no man more so. With him it did not matter what the form of gambling was, whether the stakes were large or small, or whether

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one won or lost. He believed that gambling overthrew God's law of rewards, and before I was fifteen years old I had become imbued with his belief on the subject, and I have never abandoned it.

To my father and mother jointly I am indebted for my belief in total abstinence. I do not know how young I was when I first signed the pledge. If I were compelled to guess I would say that it was the day when I first learned to write my name, although I may have signed with my mark before that. All I know on the subject is that I have never failed to sign the pledge when I could induce others to sign it, and I stand ready while I live to sign it again and again if, by doing so, I can influence any one to give up the use of intoxicating liquor.

Here are three things which have

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exerted¹ an influence upon my life and all of them became controlling influences when I was young. The fourth thing to which I refer has been even more potent. I became a member of the church at the age of fourteen, when I was only two-thirds as old as one must be to sign a deed. Did I know anything about creeds? No. I was not only too young to have any knowledge of creeds but I have been too busy since that time to give the matter much study, and I see no prospect of leisure at this time. In fact, I am almost afraid to take a deep interest in creeds for fear it might disturb my domestic relations

My father was a Baptist and, at the time of my birth, my mother was a Methodist but she afterwards joined the Baptist Church with my father. I joined

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the Presbyterian Church, first the Cumberland and afterwards took my letter, to the Presbyterian Church because there was no Cumberland Church where I attended college. My wife's father was brought up a Presbyterian but became a Methodist, and my wife entered the Methodist Church before we married but afterwards joined the Presbyterian Church with me. In Nebraska, however, we usually attend the Methodist Church because it is more convenient to our home. We have three children; our oldest is an Episcopalian, our second a Methodist, and our third a Congregationalist. And we have five grandchildren, through whom we hope to connect ourselves with other branches of the Christian Church. You see how embarrassing it would be for me to lay too much em-

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phasis upon creeds, but I have a firm hold upon the principles which underlie all the churches. I have defended Christianity around the world, but I have never made a speech upon religion that could not be made with equal propriety in any church calling itself a Christian church.

When I say that morals rest upon religion, I use the word "religion" in its broadest sense; I use it as Tolstoi used it when he defined religion as the relation that man fixes between himself and his God, and he added that morality is the outward manifestation of this inward relation.

One cannot build moral character without a plan of life, and he can only plan a life when he understands that the world is built upon a plan. The first fact that confronts a man is God.

We have given the atheist too much

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latitude. We have allowed him to ask all the questions while we have taken upon ourselves the burden of answering. Why not take turn-about in asking and answering? The Christian begins creation with an all-wise, all-powerful and all-loving Creator—a sufficient cause for all that may come after. Where does the atheist begin? Ask him, and his trouble begins. Can he go farther back than matter and force? Can he explain the origin of either matter or force? Is it not more satisfactory to begin with God and reason down than to begin with inanimate clay and reason up?

If the atheist insists that he cannot believe in God until he can fully understand such a being, I reply that his own logic will drive him to suicide. Why does the atheist desire to live when he

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does not understand the mystery of his own life? One need not understand the sun to believe that there is a sun and to enjoy the benefits conferred by the sun's rays. He need not understand electricity to enjoy the incandescent light, to ride on the trolley car, or to be stricken down by the lightning. Why not apply to religion the same common sense that we apply to other things? The atheist knows as little as the Christian does of the mystery of life, the mystery of love and the mystery of patriotism, and yet he lives, he loves and is patriotic. He knows as little of the mysteries of the food he eats, the water he drinks and the air he breathes; and yet his ignorance does not prevent his making use of all the gifts of the Heavenly Father, whose existence he denies.

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Let the young man who is building character discard at once the absurd theory that it is a sign of mental weakness to admit the limitation of the human mind, or to confess his finiteness in the presence of the Infinite. Let him recognize his responsibility to his Creator for every thought and word and deed. Let him make it his chief purpose, as it should be his highest pleasure, to seek to know God's will concerning himself and to do it. Let him bring himself into harmony with the divine plan and he will not need the "Thou shalt not's" of the law to restrain him.

Next to the belief in God I would place the acceptance of the Bible as the word of God. I need not present arguments in its support; its claims have been established—the burden of proof is

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upon those who reject it. Those who regard it as a man-made book should be challenged to put their theory to the test. If man made the Bible, he is, unless he has degenerated, able to make as good a book to-day.

Judged by human standards, man is far better prepared to write a Bible now than he was when our Bible was written. The characters whose words and deeds are recorded in the Bible were members of a single race; they lived among the hills of Palestine in a territory scarcely larger than one of our counties. They did not have printing presses and they lacked the learning of the schools; they had no great libraries to consult, no steamboats to carry them around the world and make them acquainted with the various centres of ancient civiliza-

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tion; they had no telegraph wires to bring them the news from the ends of the earth and no newspapers to spread before them each morning the doings of the day before. Science had not unlocked Nature's door and revealed the secrets of rocks below and stars above. From what a scantily supplied storehouse of knowledge they had to draw, compared with the unlimited wealth of information at man's command to-day! And yet these Bible characters grappled with every problem that confronts mankind, from the creation of the world to eternal life beyond the tomb. They have given us a diagram of man's existence from the cradle to the grave and they have set up sign posts at every dangerous point along the path.

We turn back to the Bible for the Ten

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Commandments which form the foundation for our statute law and for the Sermon on the Mount, which lays down the rules for our spiritual growth. The Bible gives us the story of the birth, the words, the works, the crucifixion, the resurrection and the ascension of Him whose coming was foretold in prophecy, whose arrival was announced by the Angel voices, singing Peace and Good-will—the story of Him who gave to the world a code of morality superior to anything that the world had known before or has known since—the story of Him who is the growing figure of all time, whom the world is accepting as Saviour and as the perfect example.

Let the atheists and the materialists produce a better Bible than ours, if they can. Let them collect the best of their

school to be found among the graduates of universities—as many as they please and from every land. Let the members of this selected group travel where they will, consult such libraries as they please, and employ every modern means of swift communication. Let them glean in the fields of geology, botany, astronomy, biology and zoölogy, and then roam at will wherever science has opened a way ; let them take advantage of all the progress in art and in literature, in oratory and in history—let them use to the full every instrumentality that is employed in modern civilization ; and when they have exhausted every source, let them embody the results of their best intelligence in a book and offer it to the world as a substitute for this Bible of ours. Have they the confidence that the Prophets of Baal

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had in their God? Will they try? If not, what excuse will they give? Has man fallen from his high estate, so that we cannot rightfully expect as much of him now as nineteen centuries ago? Or does the Bible come to us from a source that is higher than man—which?

But our case is even stronger. The opponents of the Bible cannot take refuge in the plea that man is retrograding. They loudly proclaim that man has grown and that he is growing still. They boast of a world-wide advance and their claim is founded upon fact. In all matters except in the science of life, man has made wonderful progress. The mastery of the mind over the forces of nature seems almost complete, so far do we surpass the ancients in harnessing the water, the wind and the lightning.

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For ages, the rivers plunged down the mountainsides and exhausted their energies without any appreciable contribution to man's service ; now they are estimated as so many units of horse-power and we find that their fretting and foaming was merely a language which they employed to tell us of their strength and of their willingness to work for us. And, while falling water is becoming each day a larger factor in burden bearing, water, rising in the form of steam, is revolutionizing the transportation methods of the world.

The wind that first whispered its secret of strength to the flapping sail is now turning the wheel at the well.

Lightning, the red demon that, from the dawn of Creation, has been rushing down its zigzag path through the clouds, as if

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intent only upon spreading death, has been metamorphosed into an errand-boy, brings us illumination from the sun and carries our messages around the globe.

Inventive genius has multiplied the power of a human arm and supplied the masses with comforts of which the rich did not dare to dream a few centuries ago. Science is ferreting out the hidden causes of disease and teaching us how to prolong life. In every line, except in the line of character-building, the world seems to have been made over, but the marvelous changes by which old things have become new only emphasize the fact that man, too, must be born again, while they show how important are material things to touch the soul of man and transform him into a spiritual being. Wherever the moral standard is being lifted up—

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wherever life is becoming larger in the vision that directs it and richer in its fruitage, the improvement is traceable to the Bible and to the influence of the God and Christ of whom the Bible tells.

The atheist and the materialist must confess that man ought to be able to produce a better book to-day than man, unaided, could have produced in any previous age. The fact that they have tried, time and time again, only to fail each time more hopelessly, explains why they will not—why they cannot—accept the challenge thrown down by the Christian world to produce a book worthy to take the Bible's place.

They have prayed to their God to answer with fire—prayed to inanimate matter with an earnestness that is pathetic—they have employed in the wor-

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ship of blind force a faith greater than religion requires, but their Almighty is asleep. How long will they allow the search for the strata of stone and fragments of fossil and decaying skeletons that are strewn around the house to absorb their thoughts to the exclusion of the architect who planned it all! How long will the agnostic, closing his eyes to the plainest truths, cry "night, night," when the sun in his meridian's splendour announces that noon is here.

To the young man who is building character I present the Bible as a book that is useful always and everywhere. It guides the footsteps of the young; it throws a light upon the pathway during the mature years, and it is the only book that one cares to have beside him when the darkness gathers and he knows that

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the end is near. Then he finds consolation in the promises of the Book of Books and his lips repeat, even when his words are inaudible, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I shall fear no evil, for Thou art with me, Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me," or "I go to prepare a place for you, and where I am there ye may be also."

And one more word to the young man who would plan his life on a large scale. What think ye of Christ? I do not present Him merely as the highest type of man but rather as the Bible presents Him, as the Son of God and Saviour of the world—as He presents Himself when He says, "I am the way, the truth, the life." Do you have difficulty in believing in His Divinity? It

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is because you have measured Him by the rules that apply to man. Take Him out of the man class and put Him in the God class, and then it will not be difficult to understand Him.

Measure Him by the task which He came to perform—it was not a man's task. Measure Him by the record He has made. Why, if He was but a man, has not our civilization produced another of His kind? Why are even His enemies compelled to admit the magic of His name and the wonder-working influence of the philosophy He taught? Why are His words as potent to-day as when the fishermen of Galilee became His disciples—as convincing as they were when “the common people heard Him gladly” upon the Mount of the Beatitudes?

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Are you in doubt about His power to perform miracles when He walked among men? He is performing them to-day. The Christ who can to-day open the eyes of a young man, who sees nothing but the body and knows nothing but the pleasures that come through the flesh—the Christ who can open the eyes of such an one to the larger vision of the spiritual life could have opened the eyes of the physically blind. Do you question His power to raise the dead? Go into any rescue mission and hear the testimony of those who, after years of dissipation and of crime, have come under the influence of His grace and have been born again;—behold the change—the Christ who can take a man from the gutter, one who has fallen so low that even his own flesh and blood

